

"Concrete Hope for Questioning Hearts"

Psalm 16

It's not unusual for the ordinary reading and preaching of God's Word to connect seamlessly to current events in a way that gives clarity and hope to God's people. God has ordained this to be the way that He speaks into our lives with eternal truth. When this happens, we receive clarity and courage to move forward, even when it appears that we are in conflict with circumstances around and emotions within us.

I selected the passage for this sermon about a month ago, well before the conflict between Israel and Iran broke out; this sermon was near complete when we received word last night that our military had bombed three of Iran's strategic nuclear sites. Times like these raise all sorts of questions about our futures as nations and people. As Christians, we live with the understanding that events like these will serve as forerunners to the Lord's return. I want you to encourage you this morning with two reminders:

- First: you are not alone in anticipating the Lord's return and wondering where these events fit into his plans. Every generation for the last two thousand years has at least wondered or whole-heartedly believed that they were living in "the last days"—and they've all been correct in thinking that they were. When the New Testament writers used that term, they referred to the period of time between the Lord's ascension and his second coming. Only the Lord himself knows when that time will come.
- Second: you are also not alone when you consider similar questions that have more to do with yourself or your family. Questions such as: What is my future? Where do I belong? Who can I depend upon? What do I do?

It is with all of these questions in mind that I want to offer **Concrete Hope for Questioning Hearts** this morning. And it comes to us from the book of Psalms, chapter sixteen.

The book of Psalms was given to us by God to be a song book, expressing the praises and prayers of God's people. The Psalms give words to our questions and concerns in a way that reminds all of us of the needs we share as small, frail individuals.

But more than that, the Psalms remind us of a God who is unrivaled in authority, matchless in splendor, and limitless in capacity to act on behalf of his people.

This particular psalm is called a "miktam" of David. There are six of these in the Psalms, and four them occur during times of personal crisis (56, 57, 59, 60). The word "miktam" is a little unclear in its meaning; Hebrew scholars write that it could mean a "golden song," a sudden revealing of something previously hidden, or even something worth inscribing in stone.¹ Whatever the term originally meant, we can gather from these ideas that the truths contained in this passage of Scripture are precious, worth serious thought and trust, and strong enough to build our lives upon them. This psalm begins with a request, one with which you might resonate:

¹ Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge. This is the only request David makes—for help. It implies great loss if God doesn't answer. The same

¹ Cf. D. A. Brueggeman, "Psalms 4: Titles" in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry and Writings*, eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 618, as well as Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible, Volume Three: The Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2019), 51.

word in Hebrew is used of Adam's responsibility in the garden, when God placed him there to work and "keep" it—Adam's task was to work in a way that promoted life and cultivated fruit. The garden needed a gardener in order to be what it was to be. Here, David calls upon the Lord to do that for him—to tend to him like a gardener to a garden.

Here's his logic: because God is his only hope, his "**refuge**". A refuge is a safe-place designed to protect seekers from harm. David is declaring that God is his only help, his only home, his only hope.

This is an appropriate prayer for anyone to pray. If you're ever at a loss for words in knowing how to pray in a particular situation, you can't do much better than to repeat David's words—"Help!" It is accurate, because apart from the Lord, we have no hope for survival. Apart from the Lord, we have no safe place. Apart from the Lord, we have no advocate—no one else is coming for us!

From here, David's thoughts travel from his *need* to the *source* of his supply—to God himself.² He has made a request; now he makes a confession.

² Cf. T. J. Betts, *40 Days in the Psalms* (Nashville: B&H, 2021), 42.

² I say to the LORD (YHWH), "You are my Lord (Adonai); I have no good apart from you." No one and no thing delights me like you do! With single-minded devotion, David sees God not just as the *giver* of all good, but all good in himself.³ This is an important distinction that raises a question: why do you love the Lord? Do you love God because of what He does for you, or because of who He is? Do you cherish him more than anyone or anything else, or do you attach yourself to him simply for the benefits he promises? Is God *Himself* the greatest good in your life?

He then recounts particular ways that the Lord has proven his faithfulness. These are the same means that God uses to give concrete hope to questioning hearts today. . .

1. The Lord Cultivates Our Character (vv. 3–4), primarily through the habits and relationships we form.

³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight. How does David prove that God is His greatest good? By surrounding himself with others who also set their

³ See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Vol. 15 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1973), 100.

hope on the Lord. Why is this important. Because being closely connected to other godly people reminds us that we are not alone; we are encouraged. Second, it provides support in growing closer to the Lord, because they become examples to us and us to them. Third, because our shared witness to God and his ways preaches a message to the world around us about the God we worship. Fourth, together, they reject diverse distractions foisted upon them by those whose lives are lived apart from God and His ways, as we see in the next verse:

⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips. David writes that he intentionally distances himself from those who seek satisfaction in anyone other than the God of Israel, or even those who claim the God of Israel as their God while giving their hearts to others means of salvation. He reminds us that drifting never leads back toward God or our own good; where diversions exist, multiplied more sorrows are sure to follow.⁴ Those who neglect this

⁴ John Calvin writes, "wretched idolators are perpetually adding to their new inventions, in which, they miserably torment themselves. . . [troubling] themselves

will experience one dissatisfaction after another; there will be no hope of redemption; they will lose their lives and become cautionary tales. You cannot serve two masters, worshipping the Lord and following the crowd at the same time.⁵

One of the primary ways the Lord cultivates our character, giving us space to work out what is within, is through the habits and relationships that we form? What about you—do your priorities and friendships lead you closer to the Lord, or further away from him? You might say, "Now Will, we're all Christians here. We worship the same God and don't do blood sacrifices." Make no mistake—any person or pastime that God consistently loses to in your heart is a false God that you're orienting your life toward. Anything that comes before the Lord and connecting with his people runs the risk of being idolatry to you.

Our reminder in this section is that we can always trust the Lord to cultivate our character through

without any profit or advantage, but also miserably [harassing and busying] themselves to accomplish their own destruction." See *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume 1*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 220–21.

⁵ Cf. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 19, 2nd ed. (Columbia: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 157.

the habits and relationships we form—either to make us more godly or to experience the misery of seeking fulfillment apart from him, with the hope that we will repent and turn back toward him.

2. A second way that the Lord gives us hope is with the reminder that he Controls Our Circumstances (vv. 5–6)

⁵ **The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.** David writes that the Lord is his food and drink; his sustenance; his salvation. ⁶ **The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.** David sees the Lord as the beginning, end, and in-between of his life, and he declares that the Lord has done good and right in the details of his life. Have all things worked out pleasurably in David's life? No! But David has the spiritual vision to trust the Lord's providence with his times and placement.

Oh, how difficult this can be! Discontentment and anxiety rises up in our hearts—it's not uncommon for us to be tempted to look forward with longing or backward with regret, or even resentment. But one mark of spiritual maturity is to trust the Lord's wisdom and kindness toward us in regard to the situations in our lives. And you can always trust that the Lord is providentially overseeing your

circumstances in a way that promotes your godliness and his glory through your life.

3. The Lord Gives Us Guidance (vv. 7–8)

⁷I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my hearts instructs me. To bless the Lord is to acknowledge Him as the source of all our good, and in this section, David praises the Lord for being his wise counselor.

Who among us hasn't woken up in the middle of the night with a racing mind? What we do in those moments is critical—we can either listen to our creative little hearts and spiral into hypothetical disasters, OR we can speak truth to our hearts and rest in the Lord, knowing that "he who keeps [us] will not slumber. . . nor sleep" (Ps. 121:3–4). Elsewhere, David writes "In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety" (Ps. 4:8).

Here, he goes on to say, **⁸I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.** We have to remember that God is present and active in our lives, working in ways that we can see or imagine.

The truly wise person at this point rests content in their limitations. You don't have to know everything. You can't be everywhere. You can't do everything. That's the Lord's job. We get in trouble when we try to be or do what God never intended for us to be or do. We are not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent—only he is! That's why we rely upon him to be those things on our behalf, so that we can get back to the business of trusting and resting in him. And the good news here is that you can always trust the Lord to give you guidance that is good and right in every circumstance.

4. The Lord Promises Our Preservation (vv. 9–10)

⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. ¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. David knew that trials, suffering, and death would not have the last word over him. That if he fell, he would also rise; if he suffered before people, he would also flourish before the Lord. And this leads to the last verse, which is a culmination of all that has gone before. **¹¹You make known to me the path of life; in your**

presence there is fullness of joy, and in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Wow!

We see here the clarity and abundance that God gives in his way—He will never lead you astray! There is joy in God's presence that never fades away, and delight in all that he is and does on our behalf. This God that we worship—the God who preserves us—is eternally good to us!

Are you concerned about what lies ahead in your life? Dear friend, on the authority of God's Word, if the Lord is your delight, and sustainer, and counselor, then you have nothing to fear in the days ahead. And this leads to my Takeaway Truth for this morning. . .

You can always trust the Lord.

There is never a time that you can't trust the Lord to act on your behalf, and there is no one better suited to handle your case than him. How do we know? Simply look at his Son, who perfectly fulfills this passage:

- Jesus was completely dependent upon the Father during his earthly ministry, even going so far as to say that he did nothing on his own initiative, but only what the Father told him to do (John 5:30).

- Jesus encircled himself with disciples who adopted his teaching and the message of the Gospel
- Jesus entrusted himself to the Father when ridiculed, forsaken, and crucified.
- Jesus, though crucified and buried, did not ultimately experience decay, but rose again in glory, ascended to the Father, and sits today enthroned next to him in heaven. And one day, he will return to claim all that are his so that they can enjoy life and fellowship with him for eternity.

In fact, it was this passage that Peter referenced in his famous sermon on the day of Pentecost to emphasize the resurrection of Jesus. After quoting the last half of this Psalm, he said that David **"foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:31)**. Jesus rose again to conquer sin, death, and the grave so that those who trust in him would not experience those things without hope. Paul writes in **Romans 8:32**, **"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** He then writes,

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or

persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, no angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35–39).

This kind of confidence can be ours only in Christ, who is God's emphatic response to all the questions and concerns of our hearts, reminding us that **we can always trust the Lord!**

Now. . . what does trusting the Lord look like practically? How do we translate this concrete hope into confident action?

1. **Listen to the Lord through the Word.** We must rely upon him to be our Counselor by the voice of His Spirit through the written Word. When tested by the devil in the wilderness, Jesus quoted Deuteronomy by saying that we "don't live by bread alone,

but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt. 4:4). God's Word to us is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12), "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

2. **Meditate upon the Word.** Just like Pastor Chuck reminded us last week, we turn the Word of God over and over in our minds night and day, exploring its implications for our lives (Ps. 1:2). Instead of listening to our wayward hearts and imaginations, we speak truth to them until our hearts catch up! I like to take a verse and focus on one word at a time (use Ps. 16:2).
3. **Pray the Word.** Think of reading your Bible as a conversation between you and the Lord—hear what he has to say, think about it, and pray it back to him.
4. **Live the Word.** Commit to walking in the ways that God shows to you in Scripture. You've read it, thought about it, prayed about it. . . now live it out!
5. **Share the Word.** God will give you opportunity to share with others the reason

for your hope in him. At this point, we get to serve as the Lord's mouthpieces and image-bearers, echoing His truth to the world around us. You may never preach a sermon from a platform like this, but you'll be a living sermon seen and heard in homes and hallways, schools and workplaces, ballfields and hospital rooms, and everywhere in between.

Let's all stand and read this together. . . ² **I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."** Can you say this? Friend, you can always trust the Lord. . . will you trust him?

- Perhaps you've never repented of sin and trusted in Jesus to save you and to change you. You can do that today. [Invite pastors and staff, worship team to front].
- Perhaps you're overwhelmed this morning and in need of home—I want to encourage you to come to these steps to pray and ask the Lord to remind you of the concrete hope he's given you in Jesus.
- However the Lord leads you to respond, you do so, in faith and with confidence that He is more ready to act than you are even to ask.

Pray/Invitation